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THE MILITANT

A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF WORKING PEOPLE

VOL. 70/NO. 5 FEBRUARY 6, 2006

Unionize the mines! Build the UMWA!

No miner has to die! Workers need a union to enforce safety

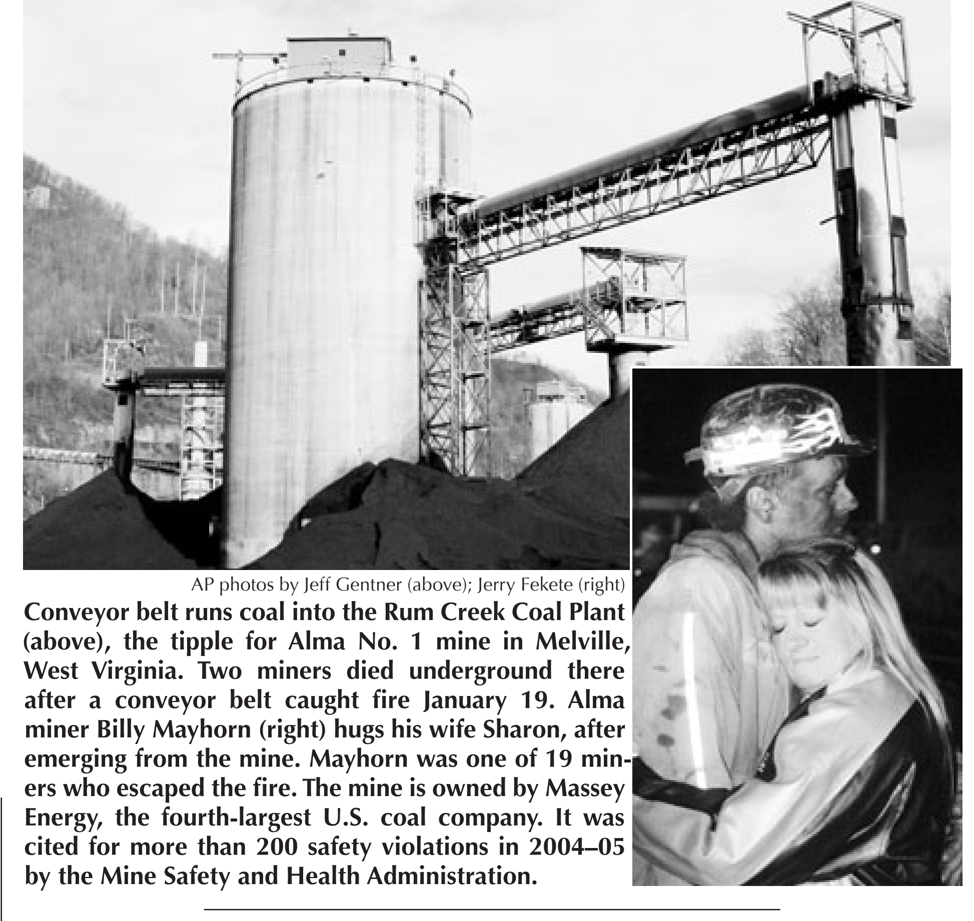
There is only one effective tool coal miners can use to ensure mine safety: a local of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) in every single mine. That's why the *Militant* is calling upon workers, farmers, and others to support union-organizing efforts by coal miners across the United States and Canada.

EDITORIAL

"Being in the UMWA is very important," says Derek Bragg, a 25-year-old roof bolter at the Robinson Run mine in West Virginia. Robinson Run is the nearest union mine to the nonunion Sago operation where 12 miners were killed after being trapped for nearly two days following a January 2 explosion.

"If we see something not safe, the union backs us up," Bragg told the

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AP photos by Jeff Gentner (above); Jerry Fekete (right)

Conveyor belt runs coal into the Rum Creek Coal Plant (above), the tipple for Alma No. 1 mine in Melville, West Virginia. Two miners died underground there after a conveyor belt caught fire January 19. Alma miner Billy Mayhorn (right) hugs his wife Sharon, after emerging from the mine. Mayhorn was one of 19 miners who escaped the fire. The mine is owned by Massey Energy, the fourth-largest U.S. coal company. It was cited for more than 200 safety violations in 2004–05 by the Mine Safety and Health Administration.

Coal boss greed kills two more miners in West Virginia

Toll: 15 in three weeks

BY TONY LANE AND JAY RESSLER

PITTSBURGH—Less than three weeks after the Sago Mine disaster in West Virginia, two coal miners were killed after a fire erupted January 19 along a conveyor belt at the Alma No. 1 mine in Melville, West Virginia. Located about 60 miles southwest of the state capital in Charleston, the mine is operated by Aracoma Coal, a Massey Energy subsidiary.

The January 2 explosion at the Sago Mine killed 12 and has left one miner in a coma. Another coal miner was killed in Pike County, Kentucky, a week later when a section of the roof collapsed at Maverick Mining Co. With the deaths of the miners in Melville, the toll in U.S. coal mines is now 15 in the first three weeks of the year.

Rescue teams in the Melville mine fought the blaze for more than 40 hours in the area where the bodies of Don Bragg, 33, and Ellery Hatfield, 47, were found. Nineteen others escaped after carbon monoxide alarms went off in the early evening of January 19.

In response to these disasters, growing numbers of coal miners in this part of the country are speaking out about the need to unionize the mines to enforce safety. "That's what they need to do, get the union in there," said

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Join effort to win 1,000 'Militant' sub renewals

Letter from the editor

Dear Reader,

Join us in the effort to put this issue of the *Militant* into the hands of thousands of working people around the world. Help us make a special effort to reach miners—not only in the coalfields but those working at gold, copper, iron, rock, and other mines. Doing so is an integral part of supporting workers' struggles to organize and mobilize union power to protect life and limb and counter the bosses' attacks.

If your subscription is about to expire, please renew. And ask neighbors, family, friends, co-workers, fellow farmers, or other students to do the same. We

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Build support for Militant Fighting Fund

BY NORTON SANDLER

"The Militant Fighting Fund is urging its backers to use the coming weeks to win new endorsers and to raise funds to defeat C.W. Mining's retaliatory lawsuit," said Paul Mailhot in a January 24 interview. Mailhot is an organizer of

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Transit workers in New York reject contract

BY MICHAEL ITALIE

NEW YORK—In a jolt to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) bosses and the city rulers, transit workers here voted down a contract proposal January 20 that included first-ever payments for medical coverage. Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100 officials had negotiated the deal with the MTA December 27. The majority of the TWU executive board, which called off a strike December 23 after three days of picketing, had recommended approval of the contract.

"I voted no," subway cleaner E.D. Rodney told the *Militant* January 23 at the Coney Island yards. "They give with one hand and take away with the other. With the little raise we got and what we would've had to pay for health care, it wasn't worth it."

The contract was turned down by seven votes—11,234 to 11,227. About two-thirds of union members voted.

The 34,000-member TWU Local 100 had hit the picket lines December 20 in response to the bosses' refusal to withdraw demands for new hires to pay 6

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Washington, Paris threaten Iran with military action

BY CINDY JAQUITH

Washington and its imperialist allies are increasing the pressure on Iran to abandon its nuclear program, threatening not only economic punishment but military attack as well.

Iran, which says it needs nuclear power to meet its energy and development needs, resumed some nuclear research in January after a voluntary freeze on these activities for nearly two years in the course of negotiations with the governments of France, Britain, and Germany. Paris, London, and Berlin abruptly declared the negotiations over on January 12 and called for referring Iran to the United Nations Security Council for sanctions, a move hailed by Washington, which accuses Iran of wanting nuclear power in order to develop atomic bombs.

On January 19, French president Jacques Chirac declared, "The leaders of states who would use terrorist means against us, as well as those who would consider using in one way or another

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Also Inside:

1,000 subscription renewals

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need your help to win 1,000 readers to renew their subs over the next six weeks. That's the goal partisans of the *Militant* have adopted—double what we had projected two weeks ago. It's an appropriate response to this moment in the class struggle, described in the front-page lead news article and editorial. It's a necessary response to the increased receptivity to the paper among working people since last fall, when more than 3,000 people signed up for new subscriptions.

A central goal of this campaign is to substantially increase the *Militant's* long-term readership. That's why new subscriptions for six months or longer count toward local sub renewal quotas that distributors adopt. At the same time, we encourage all readers to help sign up new subscribers at the special introductory rate of $5 for 12 weeks.

The day after this issue rolls off the presses, teams of *Militant* supporters are heading to the coalfields of Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Alabama, and elsewhere in the East, as well as Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, and other areas in the West. Similar efforts are being organized in many U.S. cities and other countries.

Along with selling copies of this issue and subs at mine portals, factory gates, on the job, and door-to-door in workers districts, the teams will visit readers whose subs have run out or are about to expire. Meet them in person. Get to know them. Talk to them about politics. Listen and learn from their experiences. Urge anyone interested to order a bundle and help broaden our distribution network.

And encourage them not only to resubscribe but also buy books and pamphlets on revolutionary working-class politics. Issues 12 and 13 of the Marxist magazine *New International* are offered at the special price of $25 for both (a $5 savings) with any sub renewal.

A number of readers are blazing the trail. "I am looking to start receiving a bundle of papers every week for the Young Socialists in Albany, New York," said Ben O'Shaughnessy, a student at the State University of New York there, in a January 11 note. A week later he received his first bundle of 10 papers and a list of *Militant* subscribers in his area. "Here are my first two renewals," he said in a January 24 progress report.

"Doing a little sales for an hour, taking advantage of the warm, 35-degree weather in the Twin Cities, Young Socialists were in the streets of Minneapolis," said Carlos Sánchez, in a note he sent January 16 from St. Paul, Minnesota.

"We sold 19 *Militants,* one sub, and pamphlets and books. 'The two main themes of discussion were the Sago Mine disaster and attacks on immigrants' rights,' said Gabriela Martínez. 'Bus drivers honked in support of our sign.'

"On Sunday, we visited workers in Austin, Minnesota, for the second time in a month. We discussed how to strengthen and use the unions, including the example of the Co-Op miners in Utah, and how to get endorsers for the Militant Fighting Fund. We got one sub renewal and one more new subscriber and we strengthened the *Militant's* relationship with fight-minded workers."

Such efforts can be emulated everywhere. Please send us reports like these, along with new subscriptions and renewals, by Tuesday night every week. You can join the effort! Contact the distributor nearest you (see directory on page 8), or the *Militant* directly. Become part of the campaign, and in the process have an impact on the course and outcome of unfolding class battles.

Sincerely,
Argiris Malapanis, Editor

Cuban team to play in World Baseball Classic



The U.S. government has reversed an earlier decision to block participation in the World Baseball Classic by Cuba's national baseball team, shown above celebrating September 2005 Baseball World Cup victory. Several countries had condemned the exclusion of Cuba and the International Baseball Federation threatened to withdraw its backing. Washington had said compensation Cuba would receive from the games violates its four-decades-old embargo against the island. Cuba announced it would donate those proceeds to victims of the social disaster in the Gulf Coast following Hurricane Katrina.

—SAM MANUEL

NATO soldiers in Afghanistan to undertake 'robust military action'

BY PAUL PEDERSON

NATO's new role in taking over command of the imperialist military forces occupying southern Afghanistan, and increased involvement in the U.S.-led assaults against pro-Taliban forces along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, is "the most ambitious mission in NATO's history," said Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's secretary-general, in a January 23 opinion column in the *Financial Times.*

The most ambitious, the Dutch politician wrote, "in terms of the strategic distance from our home countries, in terms of the complexity of the challenges we face in Afghanistan, and in terms of the multiple roles the alliance must take on."

The imperialist military alliance will beef up its force in Afghanistan from 10,000 to 16,000 to take on the command in the south this spring. They will operate alongside the U.S.-led forces, which will maintain a separate command and be reduced from 19,000 to 16,500. The U.S.-led NATO alliance was formed after World War II, codifying Washington's place as the top military and economic power in Europe and as part of facing off the Soviet Union. Since the end of the Cold War, Washington has pressed to transform the alliance toward taking military action worldwide.

"The alliance will probably be called on in the future to take on other, similar challenges," de Hoop Scheffer wrote. "That is one reason why it is so important to get this one right." NATO's mission in Afghanistan is important, he said, because "none of us can afford to let it slip back into chaos and become once again a breeding ground for international terrorism."

"Let there be no doubt," he said. "ISAF forces will not go to the south with one arm tied behind their back." ISAF stands for International Security Assistance Force, the name of NATO's troops in Afghanistan. "NATO forces will have the rules of engagement and the equipment they need to deal head-on with any dangers to their security or to their mission. If potential attackers threaten NATO personnel or their ability to do their job…then ISAF will be able to undertake robust military action."

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Editor and circulation director:
Argiris Malapanis

Washington correspondent: Sam Manuel

Editorial volunteers: Arrin Hawkins, Martín Koppel, Paul Pederson, Brian Taylor, and Brian Williams.

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Iraqi parties begin talks to form new gov't

BY SAM MANUEL

WASHINGTON—Sunni-led parties won a substantial number of seats in the Iraqi parliament. While charging vote fraud, officials of the largest Sunni bloc, the Iraqi Accordance Front (IAF), began negotiations with the Kurdish Alliance—part of jockeying for posts in a new government. Wealthy Sunnis who boycotted the elections a year ago organized a large turnout of their supporters for the December 15 vote.

Prior to the election, U.S. president George Bush said drawing more Sunnis into a new regime is a component of the White House plan to weaken attacks on U.S. and Iraqi government troops by supporters of the deposed Baath-party regime of Saddam Hussein.

Leaders of the main electoral bloc in the current administration, the Shiite-led United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), have also shuttled between Baghdad and the Iraqi Kurdistan capital, Erbil, to negotiate the shape of the new government.

According to Iraqi election officials, the UIA won 128 of the National Assembly's 275 seats. The Kurdistan Alliance, led by the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), won 53 seats. The IAF won 44 seats and another Sunni-led bloc won 11. A bloc headed by Iyad Allawi, a wealthy Shiite and former prime minister in the U.S.-backed interim government, got 25 seats. The results are not confirmed yet.

The Kurdish alliance and the UIA formed the backbone of the cabinet after last year's elections. This time the two are three seats short of the 184 needed to form a cabinet on their own.

Current Iraqi president Jalal Talabani, of the PUK, said there is agreement to form a "national unity government," but striking a deal would be harder now.

One contentious issue is a provision approved last October in Iraq's new constitution that defines the country as a federal state with a Kurdish autonomous region in the north and a Shiite region in the south. Sunni-led parties have opposed it on the grounds that Iraq's vast oil reserves are in those regions.

Under pressure from Washington, the UIA and the Kurdish parties promised that after a new government is formed this provision could be reconsidered.

Offering an olive branch to the Kurds, an IAF official indicated that the Sunni-led bloc might be willing to accept a Kurdish federation in the north but not a Shiite one in the south. "The Kurdish federation is a fact on the ground," said IAF leader Nassir al-Ani.

More contentious are Kurdish aspirations for control of oil-rich Kirkuk, just outside Iraqi Kurdistan's border. Since the U.S. invasion, thousands of Kurds, expelled by Hussein's regime before, have returned to the city.

U.S. government tries to block Spanish aircraft sale to Venezuela



Calling the Venezuelan government headed by President Hugo Chávez "autocratic and antidemocratic," the U.S. government barred Spain January 13 from completing a $2 billion deal to sell 12 airplanes and eight patrol boats to the South American nation. The C-295 and CN-235 transport planes (pictured above) Venezuela ordered are produced by the Spanish company EADS CASA, but contain U.S. technology and so require a U.S. export license. The Spanish government said it would move ahead with the deal after acquiring the necessary technology elsewhere.

U.S. officials have moved to block a number of defense purchases by Caracas, including pressuring the Israeli regime last October to back out of a deal to upgrade Venezuela's fleet of U.S.-made F-16 fighter jets. A similar move to quash a $120 million deal with the Brazilian government to sell its Super Tucano aircraft is anticipated in the weeks ahead. They, too, contain U.S. components.

—PAUL PEDERSON

Protests target UN/French troops in Ivory Coast

BY ARRIN HAWKINS

Protests demanding withdrawal of the 11,000 United Nations and French troops from the Ivory Coast spread throughout the West African country January 16. Thousands of youth marched on the UN headquarters in Abidjan, the commercial center, throwing Molotov cocktails, burning tires, and wrecking building walls. UN troops responded with tear gas grenades and bullets.

This recent string of protests erupted after UN "mediators" called for dissolution of the Ivorian parliament. Ivorian president Laurent Gbagbo pulled the ruling Ivorian Popular Front out of the transitional government January 18 and called the UN's proposal a "constitutional coup d'etat."

Demonstrations targeted UN and French facilities in the country. Schools, businesses, and banks were shut down. Similar actions in the western towns of Daloa and San Pedro reportedly took place, with protesters burning UN offices. UN troops killed four Ivorians in the town of Guiglo and were forced to evacuate some 300 of their soldiers and staff from the region.

"We want the complete liberation of Ivory Coast," George Kassi, 19, who joined the protests in Abidjan, told the *New York Times*. "I won't go home until the UN and France leave my country." Gbagbo issued a call to end the protests January 19, which thousands of youth defied.

Two weeks earlier, UN secretary-general Kofi Annan had called for an additional 3,900 troops and police to be sent to the Ivory Coast to help impose a "peace" accord drafted in Paris. Currently there are some 7,000 UN troops there, many from other African countries, alongside a French occupation force of more than 4,000.

Under the UN and French plan, the former head of the West African Central Bank, Charles Banny, was to act as the transitional prime minister of a new government. On December 15 the UN Security Council voted to extend by one year the arms embargo it imposed against Ivory Coast in 2004. It prohibited the sale of diamonds and threatened travel and economic sanctions against individuals it considers an obstacle to the imposition of the coalition regime.

Paris, the former colonial ruler, is seeking to end the conflict and restore stable imperialist exploitation of the country. Ivory Coast is the world's largest cocoa producer, exporting some 40 percent of the world's cocoa, worth $2.3 billion a year.

France controls most of the country's electricity, water, telecommunications, and banking. It accounts for some 24 percent of the country's imports and 33 percent of its foreign investment. Ivory Coast makes payments on a debt of nearly $12 billion owed to banks in imperialist centers, many in Paris.

Washington has been jockeying to displace Paris as the dominant imperialist power in the region. The U.S. presence in the area has steadily increased over the past decade with the discovery of massive oil deposits in the Gulf of Guinea. The Houston-based Vanco Energy Company has contracts with the Ivorian government to drill in extensive areas of the Ivory Coast's eastern deepwater. Some 200 U.S. Special Forces were deployed briefly in the country at the beginning of the civil war.

Washington, Paris threaten Iran with military action

Continued from front page

weapons of mass destruction, must understand that they would lay themselves open to a firm and adapted response on our part…. This response could be a conventional one. It could also be of a different kind."

Most media interpreted his statements as being directed against Iran. "It does not take a lot of imagination to think that he had Iran in mind, even though this was later officially denied by the Elysée," said Wolfgang Munchau in a commentary in the January 23 *Financial Times.*

In the United States, top Democratic Party politicians went out of their way to be more hawkish against Tehran than the White House.

Speaking at Princeton University January 18, Sen. Hillary Clinton (Democrat, New York) accused the Bush administration of being too slow to move against Iran. "The White House chose to downplay the threats and to outsource the negotiations," she charged. "We cannot and should not—must not—permit Iran to build or acquire nuclear weapons," Clinton said, according to the *Daily Princetonian*. "In order to prevent that from occurring, we must have more support vigorously and publicly expressed by China and Russia, and we must move as quickly as feasible for sanctions in the United Nations." She did not discount a military strike against Iran, stating, "We cannot take any option off the table in sending a clear message to the current leadership of Iran that they will not be permitted to acquire nuclear weapons."

The Democratic senator also opposed the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq and placed the onus on the Palestinian people for the continued conflict with Israel. "No more excuses for the Palestinians," Clinton said. "They have to demonstrate clearly and unequivocally their commitment to a peaceful future and they have to also demonstrate their ability to deliver services to their people."

Joseph Lieberman, Democratic candidate for vice president in 2000, said, "It's good that we're working with Britain, France and Germany, but their pace is too slow." He called for Iran's nuclear program to be referred immediately to the United Nations Security Council. Interviewed on CBS TV January 22, he added, "We've got to be prepared to take military action."

Sen. John McCain (Republican, Arizona) told Fox News, "There's only one thing worse than the United States exercising the military option, and that is Iran having nuclear weapons."

In light of these threats, the Iranian government has begun transferring currency reserves in European banks to other locations. Ebrahim Sheibani, the Central Bank governor, said Iran would "transfer the foreign exchange reserves wherever we consider expedient."

The Iranian government also called on members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to reduce production by 1 million barrels a day. Iran is the world's fourth-largest oil exporter and the second largest in OPEC.

Responding to Chirac's threat of a nuclear attack, the speaker of Iran's parliament, Gholam Ali Hadad-Adel, said the French president was "trying to restore the prestige of France after the recent unrest, when young people took to the streets and torched hundreds of cars every night," a reference to the protests in France of thousands of North African youth, many of them Muslims, against the racist abuse they face. "The French need to make an effort to remove the shame of the massacre of millions of Algerians, France's support for Saddam Hussein and the massacres in Africa and Rwanda," Hadad-Adel said, in a speech broadcast on state radio.

The Iranian daily *Jomhuri Islami* said Chirac's remarks "mean the French government would use the atomic bomb to oppress the ones who seek liberty…. Everybody knows they label anyone who opposes their exploitative and colonial demands as terrorists, and that any country sheltering such people and support[ing] them is named a supporter of terrorists…. [Chirac] has unveiled the true face of the West."

Two more miners killed

Continued from front page

Brian Braham, a member of United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) Local 1248, who is laid off from the Maple Creek mine in Pennsylvania, which closed in March 2005. "If you're worried about safety, you need the union to see it through."

Meanwhile, as investigations at the nonunion Sago Mine get under way, the International Coal Group (ICG), the mine's owner, refused to let UMWA representatives participate in interviews with Sago Mine employees. ICG did so despite the fact that several of the miners had asked the union to represent them. ICG has also threatened to not allow UMWA representatives onto company property to take part in the on-site examinations. Despite calls for public hearings, the Mine Safety and Health Administration's (MSHA) investigation into the disaster is slated to be held behind closed doors.

The cause of the fire at the Alma mine is reportedly a belt-drive motor. Fine coal dust and a buildup of coal spillage can create a highly combustible mix. Fires along conveyor belts can also result when misaligned rollers or worn-out bearings overheat.

'Not the first such fire'

"This was not the first such fire, said one Alma miner, who was granted anonymity because he feared reprisals from his employers," reported the January 22 *New York Times.* "'I worked at the belt that caught fire and had to put out a fire at the same exact spot just a couple weeks ago when the sprinkler system didn't work,' the miner said, referring to a fire he said occurred on December 23. 'I reported the fire to my supervisor, but he ignored it.'"

Last year, the Alma mine's accident rate was a third higher than the national average. The mine was cited by MSHA 113 times for safety violations in 2004 and 91 times in 2005. The most recent citations were issued December 20, when the mine was hit with seven violations such as inadequate control of coal dust and other combustibles and ventilation.

Meanwhile, the big-business media has been running articles asserting the dangers in coal mining are "inherent" to the industry and that a certain number of on-the-job fatalities, which have declined compared to decades ago, are unavoidable. A January 5 *Wall Street Journal* editorial stated, "Thanks to huge and steady investments in mine safety and technology, coal mining fatalities now average only about 30 a year—down from 1,000 a year in the first half of the 20th century. Injuries have been cut to 4,000 a year from 60,000." Wayne Atwell, a metals and mining analyst with Morgan Stanley, told the *Journal,* "Coal mining, by its nature, is extremely dangerous."

UMWA at Sago investigation

At the same time, the coal bosses are going out of their way to prevent union involvement in enforcing safety on the job. In a January 18 statement opposing UMWA participation in the Sago investigation, ICG asserted that the union had "ulterior motives," and was seeking to "exploit the tragedy…for their own purposes in an effort to revive organizing efforts that have floundered for more than a decade," and has "no familiarity or knowledge of the Sago Mine that will benefit the investigation."

One mine foreman refused to testify in front of the UMWA representatives, whom government officials then kicked out of the room. The interviews then continued without UMWA or company representatives being present. West Virginia governor Joseph Manchin said his office had stepped in after ICG objected to the union's presence and that he backed the exclusion of both the UMWA and the company from the interviews.

"Miners at the Sago mine have a right to designate the UMWA as their representative, and the union has a right to participate in the investigation," UMWA president Cecil Roberts said in a January 18 news release. He pointed out that the first thing ICG did was to try to find out the names of the miners who designated the UMWA as their representative. "The truth is that when it comes to safety, we represent every miner in America and Canada whether he or she chooses to pay dues to this union or not," Roberts told the *Charleston Gazette.*

Many working people agree. Dell Maynard, who works at the union-organized Guyan surface mine, owned by Arclight and Arch Minerals outside Logan, West Virginia, told the *Militant* that he was glad to hear that some miners had asked the UMWA to represent them in the hearings. "Right now is a good time for the rebirth of the union. At a union mine, a union rep goes with inspectors, labor is there, stuff doesn't get overlooked."

UMWA officials and other working people point out that it took 11 hours after the Sago explosion for rescue teams to enter the mine, while a timely response could have saved the men who perished there. "Mine operators rely on rescue teams that are as much as two hours away, which union officials say is too far," reported the January 22 *Washington Post.*

UMWA communications director Phil Smith told the *Militant* that both the Sago and Melville mines were organized by the union about 20 years ago. The companies then punched holes in different locations of these coal seams and reopened them nonunion, he said. "With the latest mine disasters, a lot more miners are increasingly concerned with the safety conditions in the mines," Smith said. "We are seeing more interest in the union."

"The union is an absolute necessity now, not a luxury," said Tom Samek, treasurer of UMWA Local 6290 in Nemacolin, Pennsylvania. "It is obvious that the state and federal agencies aren't doing their job mandated by law. No one else is going to stand up for safety of the miners. This is a good time to organize the union."

Tony Lane and Jay Ressler are coal miners in southwestern Pennsylvania and members of the UMWA. Paul Mailhot contributed to this article.

Georgia: protesters demand the truth after man dies in police custody



Photos by Associated Press

Some 100 protesters marched on the Marshallville, Georgia, police station January 20 hours after Clarence Walker, a 48-year-old Black man, died while in custody. Relatives saw him pepper-sprayed by the police and his face covered in bruises. Later, town police chief Stephen Stewart's house was found burned to the ground. Above, James Jackson, brother of Clarence Walker, and family gathered at home in Marshallville after Walker's death. Inset, cops look over charred remains of police chief's home.

Safety violations rampant in western coal mines

BY ALYSON KENNEDY

PRICE, Utah—The killing of 12 men after the January 2 Sago Mine explosion in West Virginia has sparked increased attention to safety in other coal-producing regions. The *Salt Lake Tribune* ran a front-page article January 15 headlined "Violations Run Deep in Utah's Coal Mines." Using federal mining data, the article points out that four Utah mines have violated federal regulations more often than the one at Sago, "and two of those mines have dozens more 'significant and substantial' violations."

Miners in Utah produced 21 million tons of coal in 2005, ranking the state 15th in the country. Since 1993, 16 miners have died on the job in Utah, the sixth-highest figure among the 50 states.

The last two years Utah mines were cited for 2,600 violations, 936 of which were "significant and substantial," and the coal bosses were fined $300,000—a bit more than $100 per violation. "It's almost a joke," Mike Dalpiaz, international vice president of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) who works out of the union's District 22 office here, told the *Tribune.* "Our coal is at such a primo throughout the country that [operators say], 'If I can mine this stuff, violate the law and still make a huge profit, why not just do it?' We are a dynamite keg waiting to blow up."

A chart the *Tribune* published with the article detailed the violations mine by mine. It shows that Dugout Canyon, owned by St. Louis–based Arch Coal, the second-largest coal producer in the country, was cited by the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) for 356 violations in 2004–05, 155 of which were classified "significant and substantial." The Sago Mine was cited 276 times in total, 120 of which were significant.

The Arch Coal bosses own two other Utah mines, SUFCO and Skyline. They were fined less than $100,000 for 703 safety violations at their three mines over the two-year period. This hardly makes a dent in the $113 million in profits the company made off nearly $2 billion in revenue for 2004 alone.

Safe Colorado mines?

"Are Colo. mines safe or lucky?" asks the headline of a January 9 *Denver Post* article. While stating that "Colorado's mines have been safer than the national average for several years when measured in terms of injuries," the article notes: "Three Colorado mines each received more citations in 2004 and 2005 than the Sago Mine."

"There has been a reversal of safety," Carol Miller, a member of UMWA Local 1984 in Rangley, Colorado, told the *Militant* January 24. "In Colorado, during the Thanksgiving holiday, the McClane mine near Grand Junction blew apart and the papers didn't write anything about this. Right now, the West Elk mine near Paonia is on fire."

MSHA cited West Elk, also owned by Arch, for 629 violations. Production at the mine has been shut down since November 2005 because of a fire that continues to burn.

"We have a union where I work," Miller continued. "The fire bosses are members of the UMWA. When we have a safety issue, it's written in fire-boss books and the union and the company have to sign off after the problem is taken care of."

"Certainly accidents happen in mines organized by the UMWA, but safety is a different matter in union mines," Phil Smith, the UMWA's communications director, told the *Militant.* "Miners in union mines have safety committees. When there is a violation, a union safety committee can work to do something about it, without the individual worker getting victimized. In a nonunion mine, if a miner says something about a safety violation, the boss says: 'If you don't like the situation, we'll find someone who does.'"

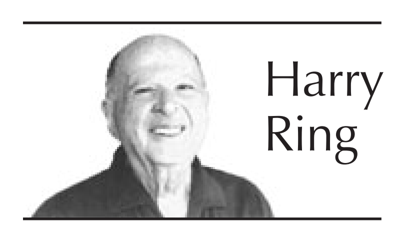
MSHA 'drug abuse' diversion

Government agencies compound the problem. Rather than rigorously enforcing safety standards broken by the bosses, MSHA began a series of hearings in October 2005 that target "drug and alcohol abuse by miners" as the source of safety problems. A Kentucky state senator recently announced plans for a bill requiring mandatory drug-testing of miners in that state.

The fruits of this approach were apparent when MSHA inspector Pat Boyack addressed a January 12 company-sponsored "safety meeting" at a Price-area mine. According to a worker who asked to remain anonymous because he could be fired for speaking out, Boyack claimed to have been informed that miners there were using illegal drugs underground.

Urging miners to come forward and reveal the alleged culprits, he said workers could do one of two things: anonymously call MSHA, or take matters into their own hands with an "ax handle." The miner said that Boyack, while referring to the Sago disaster, made a slur against miners in West Virginia, asserting that 80 percent of applicants for mining jobs there fail the drug-screening test and that companies have to relax their policies in order to meet labor demand.

Read it and retch—Phillip Yason, a World War II veteran,



died a year ago and was buried in the cemetery of a Jewish community in the London area. His grandson wrote an epitaph that was carved on the cemetery headstone. However, the community has a "Jewish court," which apparently enjoys enough community support to make "legal" decisions. The court ordered the Yason epitaph removed, asserting it was "political." What was carved in the offending stone? "Gentleman, Thinker, Socialist"! His family is angered and demanding the epitaph remain as a simple description of what Yason was.

The 'Free World' leaders—Recently released British documents on World War II show that London ordered its army to follow the official U.S. military policy at the time of segregating nonwhite troops. Previously, until then, the UK rulers grabbed men from the colonies they ruled and let Black troops share facilities with white soldiers. After the war, the White House had to end official segregation and, to some extent, so did the UK.

A mass burning of credit cards?—The Irish *Independent* reported on the giant debts status of folks in the United Kingdom, an unbelievable £1.13 trillion (£1=$1.76). Apparently runaway Xmas shopping cards became chaotic. The media is reporting: "Average household debt—excluding mortgages—is £7,650," and "Half of all heavy debtors suffer from depression."

Please note—The Great Society is now slated to appear twice a month, not weekly.

Whites only in city limits after dark

'Sundown Towns' reveals hidden dimension of U.S. racism



Chinese cannery workers being forced to board box cars during their expulsion from Humboldt County, California, in 1906. No Chinese returned to Humboldt Bay until the 1950s.

Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism, *by James Loewen, New Press, October 2005, 576 pages, $29.95.*

BY SAM MANUEL

WASHINGTON—"Nigger Don't Let The Sun Set On You In This Town!" read signs posted at the limits of many U.S. towns beginning in the 1900s. *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* by James Loewen examines the origin and development of towns that prohibited Blacks—and to some degree Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, and Jews—

IN REVIEW

from even being present in certain towns after sunset, let alone living in them.

Sundown towns were created through violent expulsions of Blacks in the Midwest and South, and Chinese in the West, which included lynchings and burning of their homes and churches. The creation of these towns was accelerated and maintained by policies of federal government agencies, wealthy real estate magnates, and banks. These pillars of capitalist society often required "restrictive covenants" that excluded Blacks, and in some cases Jews, as a condition for land purchases, building permits, and loans.

Sundown Towns dispels the popular perception that most all-white towns have always been that way. In fact, writes Loewen, following the civil war and Radical Reconstruction Blacks lived throughout the United States even in the remotest areas of states like Montana and the Upper Michigan Peninsula. All-white towns of more than 1,300 were rare.

As the antislavery climate of Radical Republicanism spread, Blacks were welcomed, in some instances into previously all-white areas. In 1862, for example, a large crowd of whites gathered in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, to welcome a train carload of former slaves. They were served a welcoming meal and offered rooms at a hotel until they could find jobs.

By 1880, nearly 180 Blacks lived in Fond du Lac. Forty years later the Ku Klux Klan would hold a rally of 5,000 in the county. The number of Blacks in Fond du Lac dropped to 22 by 1930 and 5 in 1940. In 1890 there were 119 U.S. counties reported to have no Blacks living in them. By 1930 that figure rose to 235. The same year 694 counties reported populations with less than 10 Blacks.

Chinese in the West were among the first targets. Until 1884 Chinese lived across the West, and worked in fishing, mining, and building the railroads. Scapegoated as competitors for jobs, an estimated 700-900 Chinese were driven from Rock Springs, Wyoming, in 1885.

In the 1890s Chinese were driven from the fishing industry throughout most of California and expelled from over 40 towns, Loewen says. As part of these expulsions, 480 Chinese were put aboard two steamships in Eureka in northern California that then sailed to San Francisco in February 1885. The pretext was the death of a city councilman struck by a stray bullet allegedly fired by one of two Chinese men in an argument.

Many sundown towns had nicknames that warned Blacks to keep out. During his research in Indianapolis, a convenience store clerk told Loewen the town of Anna in southern Illinois is popularly known as the acronym of "Ain't No Niggers Allowed." Anna residents played a central role in the 1909 lynching of Will James, a Black man in Cairo, Illinois. After being hanged, riddled with 500 bullets, and burned, the remains of James's charred head were displayed on a pole in a Cairo park. James had been arrested for the murder of a white woman in Cairo who was from Anna, 30 miles south. The evidence? Bloodhounds led cops to James's home. Thousands from Anna went to Cairo for the lynching.

Loewen describes how whites who hired Blacks in these towns and tried to have them stay also faced death. A.W. Berch, a hotel owner in Marlow, Oklahoma, was gunned down in 1923 when he refused to fire a Black employee living in the hotel basement. J.T. Douglas, a Hardin County farmer in southeastern Illinois, was also killed while attempting to prevent a mob from expelling a Black employee living on his farm.

In 1903 Sen. Francis Newlands established the Chevy Chase Land Company to build an exclusive suburb with that name just north of Washington, D.C. When word got out that the developer planned to include a subdivision for housing domestics and other workers, Newlands denied it. He sued the developer for fraud "by offering to sell lots…to Negroes." A Saks Fifth Avenue store was then built on the lot.

Newlands was instrumental in establishing Rock Creek Park, the largest urban recreational area in the National Parks System. The park increased his property's value in adjacent Chevy Chase by taking 2,000 acres off the market, Loewen notes. It also established a formidable barrier against nearby Black neighborhoods often referred to as "the wrong side of the park."

"Today Chevy Chase remains an enclave for rich whites," Loewen says, using recent U.S. census figures. "In 2000, its 6,183 residents included just 18 people living in families with at least one African American householder."

In 1938 the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) held that mixing nationalities and social classes was detrimental to neighborhood stability. Until 1948 its manual contained a model restrictive covenant for excluding Blacks, Loewen says. That year the agency boasted it had never insured a housing project of mixed occupancy. FHA publications listed for prospective white buyers "inharmonious racial or nationality groups" alongside such unappealing features as "smoke, odors, and fog." Some 98 percent of FHA and Veterans Administration home loans after World War II went to whites only.

Despite its length, and absence of a description of how Blacks and others resisted their expulsion from sundown towns, the book is worthwhile reading.

25, 50, AND 75 YEARS AGO

25 CENTS
THE MILITANT
A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY/PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF THE WORKING PEOPLE

February 6, 1981

On Christmas Eve fifty persons from Vitry-sur-Seine, on the outskirts of Paris, bulldozed and ransacked a dormitory where 300 immigrant workers from Mali had just been housed. They cut the electric cables, telephone lines, and gas ducts, and tore down most of the doors.

They were protesting the growing number of immigrant workers who had moved to Vitry in recent years.

This reprehensible action was taken with the approval of the Communist Party mayor of Vitry, Paul Mercieca. The mayor charged that the African immigrants had been secretly transferred from the neighboring community of Saint-Maur to his municipality.

Claiming the working class community of Vitry already had too many immigrant workers, Mercieca issued an emergency decree forbidding their settlement in Vitry.

In order to try and justify this scandalous policy, CP officials explain that when their numbers rise "above a certain threshold," immigrants inevitably encourage racism.

THE MILITANT
PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF THE WORKING PEOPLE
NEW YORK, N.Y. FIVE (5) CENTS

February 6, 1956

JAN. 30—In a stepped-up drive to win back his Veterans Administration job, legless veteran James Kutcher on Jan. 26 appealed directly to President Eisenhower to order the VA to reinstate him.

Kutcher's letter to Eisenhower recalls that he was honorably discharged from the army after losing his legs in the Italian campaign of World War II. Then after being equipped with artificial limbs he secured a file clerk's job with the V.A. In 1948 he was fired solely for his avowed membership in the Socialist Workers Party which had been arbitrarily designated by the U.S. Attorney General as "subversive."

"Now I belonged to the Socialist Workers Party before I was drafted, during my army service, and I still belong to it. I am a socialist and proud of it," the letter declares. "I intend to keep on belonging to the Socialist Workers Party as long as I think it is in the right."

THE MILITANT
Weekly Organ of the Communist League of America (Opposition)

February 1, 1931

In the present period, with the intensification of the organic ills and weaknesses of capitalism, with the dawn of new and broader horizons of class struggle, war and revolution, the vanguard of the working class, the Communists, must more than ever look to Lenin for inspiration, for guidance. It was Lenin who characterized our epoch as one of social convulsions, as one of international struggle for the proletariat. Lenin was the founder and organizer of the party of the working-class, the Communist International, which as the conscious arm of the class will inevitably lead it to victory.

Today the epigones of Leninism are in power in the International. Today the teachings of Lenin and of Marx are being ground underfoot, while reactionary theories like that of socialism in one country are proclaimed the acme of Communist wisdom. The Communist International has been crippled and paralyzed by the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Marxism, or why join the communist movement

New York event takes up contradictory development of labor vanguard

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS

NEW YORK—More than 350 workers, youth, and others attended a public meeting here January 21 to hear a talk by Socialist Workers Party national secretary Jack Barnes. The program on “The World Crisis of Imperialism and Contradictory Development of the Labor Vanguard: Marxism, or Why Join the Communist Movement,” was sponsored by the Socialist Workers Party and Young Socialists in New York and Newark, New Jersey.

Barnes began by pointing to a news report that Ford Motor Co., faced with plunging sales and profits, announced that it would close at least 14 factories and eliminate 30,000 jobs over the next four years. Ford’s projected cuts, amounting to 25 percent of its North American payroll, is similar to the job-slashing by General Motors, which plans to eliminate 30,000 jobs—17 percent of its workforce in the United States and Canada.

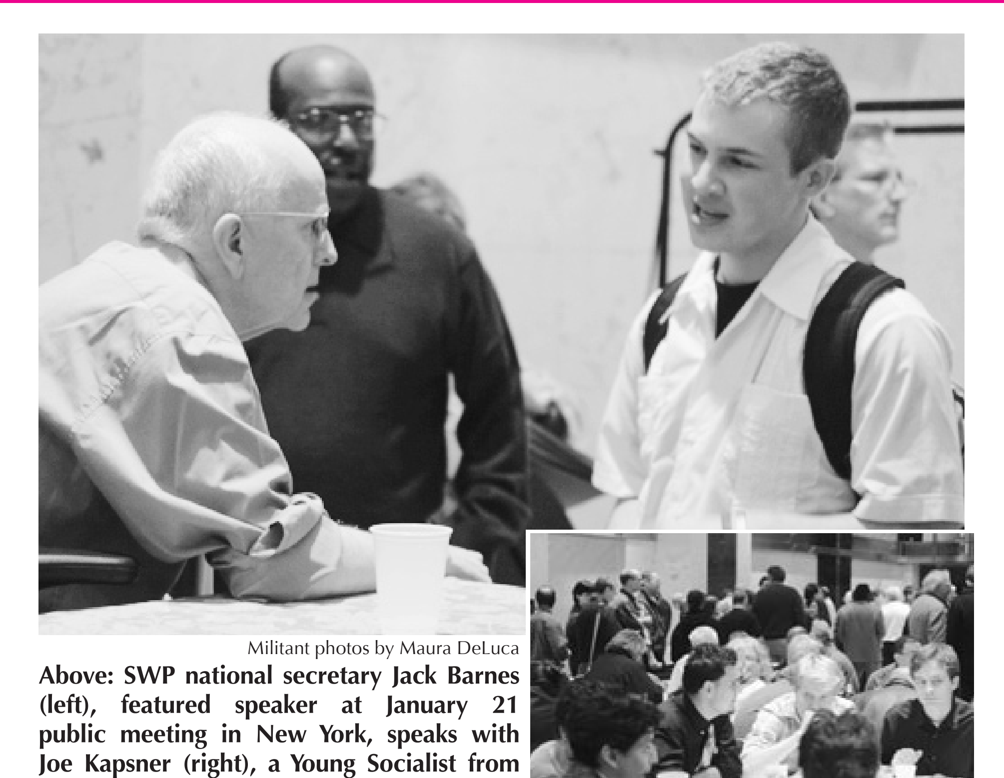
To confront its profit crisis and sharpening competition, Ford aims to become a smaller company, noted Barnes. He quoted Mark Fields, the auto company’s point man for these cutbacks, who said his goal is to put workers “in a crisis mode.”

The fact that this drive for increased productivity and profit comes at the expense of workers’ lives came through in an interview with coal boss Wilbur Ross in *Fortune* magazine that appeared just nine days after the January 2 Sago Mine explosion, where 12 people were killed underground, Barnes said.

Ross, the founder of the International Coal Group, which owns the Sago mine, told *Fortune*, “Our fundamental position is unchanged…. We are expanding. Sago produced 350,000 tons of coal last year, and we had planned on 900,000 this year.” Speaking to the *Wall Street Journal*, Ross bragged that his company’s expanding ownership of nonunion mines “is what will make us the low-cost producer.”

Barnes pointed to the bipartisan nature of the government’s complicity in the assault on mine safety. Seventeen out of 26 mine safety regulations proposed in the 1990s were never put into effect by President William Clinton, and then President George Bush just let them die. In many mines the companies pressure workers not to report injuries, including through the use of bonus systems in which workers lose part or all of their bonuses if they report injuries, noted Barnes.

Referring to the New York subway and bus workers’ rejection of the proposed contract with the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), Barnes said many of the 11,000 transit workers who voted it down were proud that they had sent a message to the MTA and government officials, including Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who had called them “thuggish.” In an editorial capturing the New York rulers’ surprise at the transit workers’ action and their hatred of these unionists, the *New York Times* declared January 21, “The workers all along said they wanted respect…. But enough is enough. It is incumbent on all sides to get this contract settled.” Above all, Barnes said, what marks employers and labor bureaucrats is that they are always stunned when something like this happens.



Militant photos by Maura DeLuca

Above: SWP national secretary Jack Barnes (left), featured speaker at January 21 public meeting in New York, speaks with Joe Kapsner (right), a Young Socialist from Minneapolis. Right: Some of the 350 people present continue discussion during dinner after program, held at SEIU 32BJ union hall.

Bosses seek to outlaw the ‘rat’

The SWP leader pointed to a legal battle taking place over whether protesting workers have the right to set up giant inflatable rats in front of employers’ property. The giant rats, popular among the working class, are a familiar figure in New York and other industrial centers. A construction company filed a complaint against the Laborers International Union for setting up the rats at work sites to protest the use of nonunion labor, and the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) is to decide soon on whether to make their display illegal.

“The bosses can’t stand this sign and symbol,” Barnes said. The unionists say that if the NLRB bans the rat, they may simply use a skunk.

Barnes spoke about the importance of the fight to defend the *Militant* against false charges of defamation brought by C.W. Mining because of its reporting on the two-year-long fight by workers at the company’s Co-Op mine to organize into the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). When the company failed to defeat the union head-on, they fired the miners and dragged them into court, Barnes said. They also targeted the *Militant*. Initially they also charged the Socialist Workers Party with defamation.

The case raises a very deep issue, Barnes explained—whether newspapers written by workers in struggle are covered by the same First Amendment guarantees of freedom of speech and of the press as other papers.

In fact, “the *Militant* and the rat have a lot in common,” he remarked. They are being attacked for the same reasons. A growing number of workers see this newspaper as a useful political weapon to advance their struggles—it helps build working-class unity and allows workers to learn from each other’s experiences, both advances and setbacks.

The *Militant*, as its masthead explains, is a socialist newsweekly published in the interests of working people. The paper belongs to the vanguard of the working class.

In this sense, the sale and use of the *Militant* is more and more part of worker-militants carrying out broader union-building and political work. This was reflected in the response by working people during the fall subscription campaign, when 3,200 people subscribed—more than double the original projection. The new readers range from independent truckers organizing into the Teamsters in Florida, to working people fighting for their livelihood in Louisiana in the wake of the social disaster sparked by Hurricane Katrina.

The recently launched campaign to win subscription renewals among these new readers offers an opportunity to involve militant workers in this effort, Barnes explained. Supporters of the paper will be contacting and visiting subscribers to ask them what they think of the paper, urge them to renew, and invite them to help circulate and write for the paper.

Bipartisan war drive against Iran

The march toward a war against Iran by a U.S.-led imperialist alliance is advancing, said Barnes, as the Iranian government exercises its right to develop its nuclear energy program. He explained that Washington’s drive against Iran is bipartisan, as illustrated in a recent speech by Democratic senator Hillary Clinton, who called for United Nations sanctions on Iran and criticized the Bush administration for not being aggressive enough against that country.

In May, supporters of Pathfinder Press will be at the annual Tehran book fair, one of the largest in the world. “The ability to make revolutionary literature available to Iranians is more important than it has ever been,” said Barnes.

The New York meeting featured a newly published Pathfinder title, *Our History Is Still Being Written: The Story of Three Chinese-Cuban Generals in the Cuban Revolution* (see ad on page 7). That book will be presented at the upcoming Havana International Book Fair, where an international team of socialist workers will be participating and staffing a Pathfinder booth. A number of meetings are planned in Havana and other cities to present the book. A launching is also planned at that fair for the latest issues, no. 12 and 13, of the Marxist magazine *New International*.

In attendance at the meeting were dozens of young people, many of whom were planning to attend the World Social Forum in Caracas, Venezuela, beginning January 24. A Young Socialists meeting January 22 attended by some 35 people discussed their participation in this event and the opportunities for building a revolutionary socialist youth organization.

A back-and-forth discussion followed Barnes’s presentation. Questions and comments ranged from Washington’s bipartisan drive toward war against Iran to the challenges facing New York transit workers, to the place of Cubans of Chinese background in the revolutionary struggle.

Meeting participants gave generously in response to a pitch for funds to help the Socialist Workers Party carry out its political work. Nearly $20,000 was given in contributions and pledges.

Among those attending the meeting was Ben Downing, 22, from the Houston area. He was about to leave for the World Social Forum and had decided to join the Young Socialists. “I was really just waiting to meet you guys,” he said, adding that he was glad to “find people who are part of an organization that is the embodiment of these ideas.”

Manuel Sánchez, 51, a member of Service Employees International Union Local 32BJ in New York, brought eight other people with him to the meeting. He had sold *Militant* subscriptions to five of them over the previous months. He said he appreciated learning more about the Socialist Workers Party and hearing the presentation and discussion on the world scene and “how workers need to organize to fight against the economic crisis.”

Cuban mission named after leader of 1843 slave revolt

We reprint below excerpts from the article "Carlota the Rebel," which appeared in the Nov. 10, 2005, Granma International*, the weekly English-language edition of the Cuban daily* Granma *published by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba. This is the last installment of a six-part series the* Militant *has published to mark the 30th anniversary of "Operation Carlota," Cuba's internationalist response to Angola's request for help in defeating the invading armed forces of South Africa's apartheid regime in 1975.*

BY MARTA ROJAS

The fifth decade of the 19th century was characterized by successive rebellions on the part of African and Cuban-born slaves, particularly in the great plain of Havana-Matanzas, the emporium of the slave-owning oligarchy, given the wealth of its land and the profusion of the sugar-cane industry….

Traditional Cuban history never touched on the impetuous beginnings of the slave rebellion in that historical period. But that silence—or deliberate omission in more than a few cases—is not the case in these years of Revolution. The restored landmarks include the rebellion at the Triunvirato sugar mill in Matanzas and, more specifically, the heroic dimension of Carlota, the pro-liberation slave.

The uprising led by Carlota and a group of rebel slaves had international repercussions. A few days after the rebellion began, the *Vandalia*, a U.S. Navy corvette, appeared in the port of Havana under the command of Rear Admiral Chauncey, the bearer of an "official" letter from the Spanish Business Attaché in Washington, which notified Captain General O'Donnell that he could count on the aid of the United States to crush the "Afrocuban" rebellion, a document that Commander Chauncey, accompanied by a Mr. Campbell, the U.S. consul in Havana, presented to the colonial governor in an official ceremony with full diplomatic rigor.



Drawing of slaves on a tobacco plantation in Cuba around 1840. In 1843, Carlota, a slave in Matanzas, led a revolt for emancipation. She was eventually captured and executed. Cuba's internationalist mission to Angola in 1975 was named after her.

This support further spurred on the repression meted out by the Spanish authorities in Matanzas of the slaves who participated in the Triunvirato uprising, from the governor and district captains, to the slave owners of farms and sugar mills, to simple overseers. In the end, Carlota was literally torn apart. But her action was an epic one.

This was the beginning: the drums were talking in the Triunvirato mill in the months of July and August, 1843. Two Africans were in contact. They were Lucumies: Evaristo and Fermina, from the Acana mill. They devoted themselves to campaigning among the slaves to put an end to the brutality of that system. They managed to communicate via drums which they played with eloquence. On November 5, 1843, the Triunvirato slaves rebelled. There was a military trial from which it emerged that the Matanzas Military Committee had uncovered a vast conspiracy in the above-mentioned mills.

In addition to Fermina, other women had an energetic participation in the anti-slave movement, as well as their men. There was a militarily gifted and exceptionally daring woman in the front line: Carlota, of Lucumi origin, who belonged to the Triunvirato mill. Involved with her in the rebellion were Eduardo, a Fula; Carmita and Juliana, Cuban-born; Filomena, a Ganga from the Acana mill; and Lucía, a Lucumi from the Concepción estate, all of them in Matanzas.

For the white slave owners what they heard was merely a drumming ceremony from a black slave cabin calling to the ancestors. But the fact is that at 8:00 p.m. on the night of Sunday, November 5, Eduardo, the interpreter of the kettle-drum voice, advised everybody, and Carlota, Narciso and Felipe, and the Ganga Manuel, like the "spokesperson," had already sharpened their work machetes. At that hour the objective was not the cane plantations, but the brutal plantation manager, his overseers and lackeys. It was they who first felt the blades of steel and were felled, their pistols and rifles seized, as well as similar weapons from other white individuals who abandoned them in all haste.

Somewhat terse concerning these cases, the official municipal representatives on the Military Committee relate for history that the blacks "set fire to the main house, part of the plantation and the sugar mill huts."

The Fermina from the Acana mill, who took part in a rebellion on August 2, had been imprisoned with shackles from which she was released by her brothers and sisters on November 3. Carlota and her captains, according to their secret plan, had gone from Triunvirato to Acana to free the slaves.

Nobody should imagine, because it would be naïve, that Carlota went with a holster strapped to her chest, and in boots. She went barefoot, in her threadbare dress. The successes at Triunvirato and Acana must have encouraged the rebel slaves who were fighting for freedom and they continued their surprise attacks in the area…. But the governor's powerful forces were already pursuing Carlota the Lucumi, Eduardo the Fula and her other comrades, and in a battle as unequal as it was bitter—presumably due to the difference in the strength, quality, and quantity of the enemy firepower—Carlota was taken prisoner and tied alive to horses pulling in opposite directions until she was torn apart.

According to the annals, Blas Cuesta, administrator and co-owner of the San Rafael mill, earnestly appealed to the governor of Matanzas, who had just arrived on his property, not to continue massacring defenseless blacks. Some slaves who escaped got as far as the Ciénaga de Zapata and continued fighting in the Gran Palenque (hideout of runaway slaves) in the Cuevas del Cabildo.

Fermina was shot with four Lucumies and three Gangas in March 1844.

This was not the only or the first slave conspiracy or rebellion. One would have to recall that of José Antonio Aponte in 1812. And long before, the determined and victorious protest of the slave miners of Rey in El Cobre (1677), until their freedom was de jure acknowledged in 1801.

In terms of its vigor and bravery, Carlota's liberation struggle is part of the Cuban heritage of rebellion against oppression. Thus her name has been enshrined as a symbol of the operation that gave rise to the Cuban military mission in Angola 30 years ago. It was as if the bones and blood of Carlota and her comrades in the uprising joined together again to serve the liberation of the descendants of those Africans who contributed to the forging of the Cuban nation.

Conservative Party wins federal election in Canada

BY BEVERLY BERNARDO AND JOHN STEELE

TORONTO—The minority Liberal Party government of Prime Minister Paul Martin, elected in 2004, went down to defeat in Canada's January 23 federal election. Winning 124 of the 308 seats in the House of Commons, the Conservatives will form a minority government under party leader Stephen Harper, who will become the next prime minister.

The political questions at the center of the elections for Canada's capitalist rulers were how to respond to growing tensions with their U.S. imperialist competitors, and their failure to push back the national aspirations of the Quebecois, an oppressed nation within Canada.

The Conservatives increased their total number of seats by 25, while the Liberals dropped from 135 to 103. The New Democratic Party, a social-democratic party based on the trade unions, jumped from 19 to 29 seats.

The Bloc Quebecois, which advocates sovereignty—independence—for Quebec and only runs candidates in that province, dropped three seats, winning 51 of Quebec's 75 seats. The Conservatives, which had no seats there, won 10. The Liberals dropped from 21 to 13.

Early in the campaign, U.S. ambassador David Wilkins publicly complained about the "American-bashing" tone of the Liberal Party campaign. Constant criticisms of "your number one trading partner" could "hurt the Canada-U.S. relationship," he said.

Harper successfully campaigned on the promise to patch up relations with Washington. For example, he called for reconsidering the Liberal government's refusal to participate fully in Washington's new ballistic missile defense system.

Taking advantage of the collapsing Liberal Party base in Quebec, the Conservatives took initiatives to win support in that region by promising more powers to the provinces. This included a promise to give the Quebec government a higher "visibility" in international arenas such as UNESCO.

"The Tory government will deepen its attacks on workers' life and limb as it increases its intervention in the war in Afghanistan," said Michel Prairie, the candidate of the Communist League in Toronto-Centre. "We join workers organizing unions and extending union power to defend themselves in face of these attacks."

Deaths on the job, racism sparked 1968 Memphis strike

BY SAM MANUEL

The fight for safety on the job, and the need to organize unions to enforce it, has come more to the fore at the opening of this year as working people in the United States face increasing deaths of coal miners and more fatalities and injuries in construction and other industries. In this situation, lessons from the past are crucial.

Safety on the job was the issue that sparked the historic strike by sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1968. On February 1 of that year two Black sanitation workers took refuge in the back of a garbage truck to get out of the rain. Under the rules of racial segregation at the time, Black workers on the crew were not allowed to leave the trucks to seek cover during inclement weather if they were in a white neighborhood.

An electrical short in the wiring of the old and poorly maintained trucks caused the compressor to start running, and Echol Cole and Robert Walker were crushed to death. The Memphis Sanitation Department gave the families of each worker a month's pay plus $500 for funeral expenses. No city official attended the funerals and no further compensation was extended. The average wage for Black sanitation workers was $1.70 an hour.



Striking sanitation workers march in Memphis, Tennessee, March 29, 1968. National Guard was mobilized to intimidate strikers and supporters in the Black community. The strike became the focus of a general fight against segregation.

On the same rainy day, 22 Black sewer workers had been sent home without pay. Their white supervisors were retained, and after an hour when the rain stopped went to work for the day. The Black workers complained they were given two hours "call-up pay," while their white supervisors were paid for the complete day.

On February 11, T.O. Jones, president of all-Black Local 1733 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, held a meeting attended by more than 700 union members to discuss what to do about the deaths, partial pay on rainy days, and safety conditions. The city refused to negotiate with the local and the strike was on.

The walkout quickly became the center of the general fight against segregation. Blacks made up 40 percent of the city's population but held only 8 percent of city jobs. The best positions were designated "customary white jobs" in 34 of the city's departments. Fourteen departments had no Black employees and 23 had fewer than three Blacks.

The strikers demanded union recognition with a written contract, effective grievance procedures, dues check-off, merit promotion without regard to race, equal treatment in the retirement system, overtime pay, and wage increases. When it became clear that City Council hearings on the strikers' demands were just a stalling tactic, the Black community launched a campaign of protest marches and boycotts, which also involved high school students. The struggle received support of several union bodies, including the Memphis and Tennessee AFL-CIO.

On March 18 Martin Luther King Jr., addressed a rally of 12,000 at the Mason Temple. The strike remained solid with fewer than 100 strikers crossing the line. Less than 70 of the city's 190 trucks were in operation.

King returned to the city on April 4 where he was assassinated. Some 65,000 National Guardsmen were deployed to quell revolts in Black communities across the country. On April 7, 1968, some 8,000 people marched in Memphis. The city then recognized Local 1733.

New York transit workers reject contract

Continued from front page

percent of their income into the pension plan. Union members said they went on strike against the two-tier plan because it would divide the union.

Although the transit bosses withdrew their pension demands, the deal between union officials and the MTA called for all workers to make payments of 1.5 percent of their income toward medical coverage, with that figure likely to grow in the next two years of the contract because it's tied to rising costs of health care. "I'd hate to leave that legacy to the workers coming behind me," Steve Shaw, a subway car inspector in the Bronx, said January 22. At a time when Ford, General Motors, Northwest Airlines, and other corporate giants have imposed similar concessions on workers, Local 100 has been able to maintain a health-care plan fully funded by the employer.

The 37-month proposed contract included annual wage raises of 3 percent, 4 percent, and 3.5 percent, and medical coverage for retirees too young to qualify for Medicare or who live outside the metropolitan area.

The contract also provided for refunds on overpayments on the pension plan by as many as 20,000 Local 100 members. New York governor George Pataki has threatened to veto legislation needed to pay for the refunds, and a number of workers said they didn't want to be locked into a contract if one of its gains could be taken away by the stroke of a pen.

Unionists had walked the line for three days, faced a constant media barrage, and had been labeled "thugs" and "selfish" by the mayor. After the strike, some union members have been sporting a button reading "Union Thug" to get back at government officials and their antilabor language.

"The contract was unfair because of the medical payments," said Marc Parris, a subway operator at the Coney Island yards. Like a number of workers at this large subway center, he objected to the 1.5 percent payments coming off their total income, resulting in larger payments for any overtime worked. "If there had been a flat rate it would've been OK," said Parris.

Workers still face the threat of fines under the Taylor law, which bans strikes by public workers. "We shouldn't have gone back to work from the strike without an exemption" from the antilabor law, added Robert McLaughlin, also a subway operator. A state Supreme Court judge in Brooklyn has announced hearings in February or March on $1 million per day fines against the union, individual fines on union members, and possible jail time for union officials.

The MTA announced plans January 23 to file a declaration of impasse with the state's Public Employment Relations Board. If the board rules that an impasse has been reached, it could send the negotiations to binding arbitration. A spokesperson for Local 100 president Roger Toussaint said the union opposes binding arbitration because "it negates our members' right to vote on the contract."

Lamont Alston, with 12 years as a cleaner, said he voted yes on the settlement, but "the contract could be better. We needed to go on strike. We should have stayed out longer." As for binding arbitration, "You usually come back with something worse," he said.

Nancy Boyasko contributed to this article.

EDITORIAL

Unionize the mines! Build the UMWA

Continued from front page

Militant. "At nonunion mines, I know from experience you do what the boss says or lose your job."

That is the growing conviction of both union and nonunion miners throughout the coalfields. A conviction bolstered by the deaths of 15 workers at two West Virginia mines and a third in Kentucky the first three weeks of 2006.

The stakes are high for all working people, not just miners. As competition for profits intensifies worldwide, the health and safety of workers and farmers are on the capitalists' chopping block, along with our wages, pensions, medical care, and simple dignity on the job. With utter disregard for the human toll, employers are speeding up production in mines, mills, factories, and among rail workers, truckers, and airlines employees. Deaths and maimings are mounting among farmers struggling to cover rising costs and meet interest payments to the banks.

Many daily papers carrying news of the miners who just died in Melville also reported a study showing that 20 percent of day laborers in the United States suffered injuries last year requiring medical attention—in six out of 10 cases causing them to miss more than a week of work.

Class conscious workers "must be able to assert with complete confidence and integrity that the stronger and more militant the union, the safer the operations of the industry, whatever it may be," Socialist Workers Party national secretary Jack Barnes explained in a 1995 talk printed in *Capitalism's World Disorder* (see ad on page 6). "This is a fundamental matter of class pride, of self-respect, of the morale of the working class. It is a question of the working class taking the moral high ground in the battle against the exploiting class and for human solidarity."

With UMWA safety committees in every mine, coal miners can use union power to walk off the job if mine roofs are inadequately secured. They can refuse to work if explosive coal dust levels are high or very combustible gases are building up. They can insist on the repair of faulty conveyor belts, exposed wiring, or other defective equipment before any coal is cut. They can say no to the bypassing of safety devices on mine machinery.

Left to their own profit greed, the coal bosses will never take such measures. With coal prices at record levels, they are stretching out the workweek, cranking up output, and slashing costs. They couldn't care less about the limbs, lungs—and lives—of workers. And as recent events show, government "regulatory" agencies such as the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) either wink at violations or levy fines so small—a few hundred bucks for the most serious infractions—as to be contemptible.

The coal barons, their Wall Street underwriters, and their kept Democratic and Republican politicians cannot state these callous profit calculations outright. So, they come up with rationalizations. "Coal mining, by its nature, is extremely dangerous," a so-called analyst for the Morgan Stanley brokerage house told the *Wall Street Journal* January 21. And Sago Mine owner Wilbur Ross said his "fervent hope" is to "reduce the risk the next time a miner is underground."

But these are self-serving lies. There is nothing "inherently unsafe" about coal mining or other jobs. *Not a single worker has to be killed or injured in a mine or any other workplace.* It's possible to *eliminate* risks, not just "reduce" them. That needs to be labor's goal.

That's not the goal of Wilbur Ross or other big-business owners, however. Ross's goal, as he told the *Journal*, is to make his International Coal Group "the low-cost producer" in the industry. The company's plan for Sago, where miners produced 350,000 tons of coal last year, is to mine 900,000 tons in 2006!

As Democratic and Republican politicians always do for a week or two after mine disasters, West Virginia governor Joseph Manchin and U.S. senator John Rockefeller have wagged their fingers and pledged new state and federal mine safety laws. While additional such measures are certainly called for, it was not inadequate legislation that led to the 15 deaths over the last three weeks. MSHA, for example, had cited the Sago Mine 208 times last year for violations of *already-existing regulations.* "Yes," Wilbur Ross told *Fortune* magazine, "they found violations, but not enough to close it down."

Working people cannot rely on MSHA or other agencies of local, state, and federal governments, all of which speak and act on behalf of the employing class. In fact, the mine agency's most vigorous effort in 2005–06 has been to point the finger at workers. To hear it from MSHA and the coal bosses, alcohol and drug use among miners is the biggest safety issue in the mines!

Tens of millions of working people know better. We know the bosses' profit drive is responsible for unsafe and unhealthy conditions on the job. We know government inspectors officially mandated to protect workers and the public are in fact beholden to the wealthy businesses they are supposedly regulating.

Progress by coal miners in organizing the mines can set an example and be a source of inspiration, practical lessons, and solidarity for workers in other industries seeking to use union power to counter the bosses' attacks. That's the road to defending life and limb of working people and our allies, not only in the United States but the world over. Support all struggles by miners to unionize!

LETTERS

Farmers in Ontario

Farmers in Ontario took advantage of the federal election campaign to raise demands for government aid to meet growing costs of production and deal with falling prices for their products. According to the biweekly *Voice of the Farmer,* on December 14 thousands of farmers near Ottawa and Belleville in eastern Ontario, and at Woodstock and Wallaceburg in southwestern Ontario, held tractorcades and farm rallies. As a result, Conservative leader Stephen Harper, Liberal Prime Minister Paul Martin, New Democratic Party leader Jack Layton, and Green Party leader James Harris toured farm areas following the actions, promising some form of aid.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the main farmers' organization, has been organizing well-attended all-candidates meetings through January in rural areas. With its campaign and three candidates the Communist League has been distributing its platform to workers at plant gates and on picket lines that states: "For government-funded affordable credit for working farmers. Support for the fight of farmers in Ontario and elsewhere for price supports to cover production costs. Stop farm foreclosures!"

John Steele
Toronto, Ontario

The letters column is an open forum for all viewpoints on subjects of interest to working people. Please keep your letters brief. Where necessary they will be abridged. Please indicate if you prefer that your initials be used rather than your full name.

World Social Forum opens in Caracas



Militant/Brian Taylor

CARACAS, Venezuela—Tens of thousands of people, mostly from the Americas, participated in a march and opening rally of the World Social Forum here January 24. Trade unionists and members of peasant and youth groups are attending the five-day event.

—BRIAN TAYLOR

Militant Fighting Fund

Continued from front page

the Salt Lake City–based fund.

"This effort goes hand in hand with circulation of this special issue of the *Militant* newspaper, which is calling on working people everywhere to back the United Mine Workers union in their work to organize nonunion mines and to mobilize union miners to re-impose safer working conditions in coal mines across North America."

The 15 deaths in West Virginia and Kentucky mines in recent weeks have focused attention across the United States and beyond on the conditions coal miners face, said Mailhot.

"Backers of labor rights, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press who are approached by supporters of the Militant Fighting Fund in coming days will appreciate the *Militant*'s call for workers everywhere to back the UMWA in organizing coal mines," Mailhot explained. "They will likewise appreciate a discussion on the issues in C.W. Mining's lawsuit against the *Militant*, the United Mine Workers of America, 16 of the former Co-Op coal miners, and the two largest newspapers in Utah—the *Salt Lake Tribune* and *Deseret Morning News.* We can help them understand how the coal bosses launch retaliatory lawsuits like this one to prevent workers from having the right to speak out on the need to organize a union, and about the working conditions they face, especially safety on the job."

At stake in this lawsuit, Mailhot said, is the right of a working-class newspaper to tell the workers' side of the story. Mailhot urged supporters of the Militant Fighting Fund to take advantage of the fact that the presiding judge postponed until February 17 the court hearing, which had been scheduled for January 25, to break new ground in winning support for the case. On that day the various defendants will argue before the court their respective motions to have the case dismissed.

"In addition to winning new endorsers, we need funds to fight the lawsuit," Mailhot emphasized. "The bosses have deep pockets. They try to drain the resources of a workers' newspaper like the *Militant.* The paper has already spent tens of thousands of dollars defending itself in the suit since it was filed in September 2004, even before its first motion to have the case dismissed is decided." Mailhot encouraged backers to use the growing Militant Fighting Fund endorser list to win new support. He cited several recent endorsers.

Howard Allen, a retired merchant seaman and member of the Seafarers International Union, has added his name. He joined the labor defense fight after spending a couple hours at his New Orleans home talking with *Militant* reporters. Allen was among the first working-class residents of that city who told their story to the *Militant* last September as the social disaster unfolded in the Gulf Coast in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Allen contributed $200. "You must need a lot of money for this fight," he said.

A growing number of union locals are backing the case too and contributing to the fund. They include International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 19 in Seattle and International Longshoremen's Association Local 21 in Beaumont, Texas. The two locals have donated $1,000 and $500, respectively.

Last week an important endorsement came in from the Spelman College Student Government Association in Atlanta, Georgia.

Support also continues to arrive from outside the United States. In Christchurch, New Zealand, the National Union of Public Employees took up the case at a recent meeting and three organizers of the union endorsed. Also in Christchurch, Campbell Duignan, southern regional secretary of the Service and Food Workers union, pledged support to the case.

Please send endorsements and donations to Militant Fighting Fund, P.O. Box 520994, Salt Lake City, Utah 84152-0994; fax (801) 924-5910.